

Invocation at Annual Curacao Consular Corps Luncheon Celebrating
The United Nation's International Day of Peace
By U.S. Consul General Valerie Belon
October 24, 2012

Bon tarde. Bon bini.

Thank you. For me, it was a distinct and humbling honor to have been asked by our dean and my dear friend Helga to deliver the invocation at this important occasion to reflect on peace. I look forward to this annual event, celebrated on United Nations Day. It is an opportunity to step back and ensure my focus, my day-to-day challenges, and my aspirations are aligned with the path toward peace. It is particularly meaningful to me as it will also be my last year in Curacao before I am transferred to another diplomatic assignment. I wish to make the most of my final year in Curacao personally, professionally, and as a member of the consular corps.

Our theme today is "Peace." I look at this three ways. First, I see the only true path to peace is through empathy, compassion, and open-minded communication. The combat boots of battle are never the ones chosen when one is obligated to walk a mile in the shoes of another.

I'm a big fan of social medial. I'm young enough to use LinkedIn, but old enough to have no idea how to change my wifi password. Well, after the election, I read one very interesting commentary on Facebook written by someone I don't know and have never even heard of. Regardless of who this person is, her comments cause me to pause and reflect.

I quote:

Regardless of your political preference, the outcome of (the) election demonstrates that the majority of the population has a "need" that has not been addressed in the last years or decades or even centuries. Regardless of whether or not you agree with their campaigning methods or

their political message, the prevailing parties were able to touch a nerve with many, and appeal to them.

They have yet to be heard... heard by our past leaders, by our regime and by our society here in Curacao.

Many dismiss the pueblo as “those people”, and generalize them as uneducated and easily fooled, but “those people” are our neighbors. Regardless of their education or their economic and social worth, they are our brothers and sisters and part of who we are in Curacao. We should care no less for their needs and listen no less to their voice, as we do ours. Many may argue that “they” do not know what is best for the island, but has anyone stopped to REALLY listen and read between the lines of rhetoric as to what their needs and wants are?

Perhaps now would be a good time to listen. And instead of focusing on who has the political reins in the future, we, as individuals and as a society, should perhaps address the true “needs” of EVERYONE in this community.... We may all have our individual ideas of what the community’s needs are, but let’s also listen to our neighbor’s voice without dismissal. This is the only way we can move forward as a country and avoid any further division and subsequent economic and social repercussions.

It’s not always about “ME”, it’s about “US”.

End quote.

Understanding the other side does not mean accepting their arguments. Making a sincere effort to understand, to sit down and speak as equals, showing respect and humility is a sign of strength, not weakness. So, I would argue that the path to peace is through empathy.

Second, I can imagine a graphic display with peace along one axis and repression along the other, showing a curve that goes down and back up again. The most repressed societies are peaceful. I assert this thinking of the example of North Korea or the internal dynamics of medieval societies, where each member knew and accepted his station, serf or nobility. At the other extreme are societies that eliminate repression in favor of empowerment in every sense – education and other tools promoting opportunity, freedom from persecution, respect for diversity, including racial differences, religion, sexual orientation, political ideology, freedom of expression, for which the United States and other societies often pay a high price. As a diplomat, it pains me to see my colleagues evacuated

or murdered, to see our embassies vandalized. Still, I strenuously defend my compatriots' right to say stupid things, to loudly voice and proclaim even the most disagreeable and distasteful assertions. The freedom of expression is no longer easily taken away in these modern days of social media on the internet. With Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, everyone has a voice. But these free societies are generally peaceful, Canada and Norway are peaceful. Despite the often acrimonious political debates, the United States is peaceful because – not despite – our freedom from repression. Because – not despite – the empowerment of the meek who have an equal vote in choosing our leaders.

Third, I find that serving one's community helps us to achieve inner peace and fulfillment in life. Success is not only measured in promotions, honors, awards, and material wealth. The friendships I have formed in community service work, including my work with the consular corps association, have brought joy and fulfillment to my life in Curacao.

Inner peace through service. Fulfillment attained by building friendships and working for a cause larger than oneself.

Peace through Service can also refer to peace in a larger sense. By this I mean that it is also our duty to serve, to work toward peace. We should not stand idly by when we see pain, suffering or injustice. It is our duty to serve our community to right those wrongs. Indifference is a comfortable but dangerous place.

Speaking on the perils of indifference, Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel once said "indifference can be tempting -- more than that, seductive. It is so much easier to look away from victims. It is so much easier to avoid such rude interruptions to our work, our dreams, our hopes. It is, after all, awkward, troublesome, to be involved in another person's pain and despair. For the person who is indifferent, his or her neighbors are of no consequence. And, therefore, their lives are meaningless. Their hidden or even visible anguish is of no interest. Indifference reduces the other to an abstraction."

It is my sincere hope that together we can resist the temptation of enjoying the false peace of indifference and instead build a true and lasting peace through

empathy, freedom from repression, service, empowerment and action. Look around. Really, look around the room. If we cannot act to bring about positive change, progress toward peace, then who can?

We can make a difference, even if only by setting an example by how we go about our daily lives. I will close by reciting the Serenity Prayer in its entirety, including its little known second verse.

God please grant us

the serenity to accept the things we cannot change;
the courage to change the things we can;
and the wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world
as it is, not as we would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right
if we surrender to His Will;
That we may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with Him
Forever in the next.
Amen.